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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KRAMER'S FAREWELL MEETING WITH PRIME
MINISTER ARTHUR

REF: STATE 141592

Classified By: Ambassador Mary Kramer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During her October 23 farewell meeting with Barbados' Prime Minister Arthur, Ambassador Kramer took stock of U.S.-Barbadian relations and discussed areas where greater collaboration could be useful. Ambassador Kramer urged Prime Minister Arthur to review Barbados' stance on Venezuela's candidacy for the UNSC GRULAC seat, but the Prime Minister made it clear that Barbados is unlikely to break with CARICOM consensus on this issue. End Summary.

"Wonderful Friendship"

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Owen Arthur began by thanking Ambassador Kramer for the "wonderful friendship" that has characterized U.S.-Barbadian relations during Ambassador Kramer's three years in the Eastern Caribbean. He acknowledged that much progress has been achieved and, alluding to plans for celebration of Caribbean Heritage Month in June 2007, suggested that the region was on the cusp of making its relationship with the United States even more productive. He extended an invitation to President Bush and Ambassador Kramer to attend the opening of George Washington House in January 2007.

"Heavily Nuanced Relationship"

¶3. (C) Describing Barbados' and CARICOM's relationship with Venezuela as "heavily nuanced," Prime Minister Arthur acknowledged without prompting that the region itself had many problems with Venezuela, among them the disputes over the Bird Island and border with Guyana. He also spoke about Venezuela's negative impact on the hemispheric agenda of democratization and liberalization, citing as an example Venezuela's disruptive performance at the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Argentina. Despite these "nuances," however, the Prime Minister did not offer anything more substantive on the issue of the GRULAC UN Security Council seat than to note the need for a multilateral decision. Ambassador Kramer urged the Prime Minister to consider the integrity of the Security Council. While this argument seemed to resonate with Prime Minister Arthur, he made it clear that Barbados would be looking for "common ground" rather than bucking CARICOM consensus.

14. (C) When Prime Minister Arthur expressed disappointment over the hemisphere's recent leftward drift, Ambassador Kramer took the opportunity to urge him to be more outspoken in defense of the values shared by Barbados and the United States. Ambassador Kramer noted that the public rhetoric of Caribbean and Western Hemisphere leaders has rarely matched their sentiments expressed in private. Such dissonance was difficult to interpret and undermined our partnerships with countries in the region. Prime Minister Arthur agreed, and he looked almost sheepish when Ambassador Kramer in turn expressed disappointment at the quid pro quo foreign policy exercised by some of his Eastern Caribbean counterparts, who expressed willingness to trade their votes on the UNSC seat for infrastructure and other assistance.

Economic Integration, Debt Relief, and Risk Management

15. (SBU) Speaking at length about the issue on which he has exercised regional leadership, Prime Minister Arthur urged the United States "to be associated" with the CARICOM Single Market Economy (CSME) integration process. Ambassador Kramer agreed that CSME's goals were well aligned with President Bush's support for stable democracies built on a foundation of strong and resilient economies. Prime Minister Arthur noted that through CSME, the Eastern Caribbean countries will become better partners for the United States and expressed his determination to continue pressing the CSME effort forward. He asked Ambassador Kramer to earmark some portion of U.S. assistance to the region for a regional development fund that will seek to counter some of the economic dislocations expected as a result of the greater opening and integration of the region's markets.

16. (SBU) Prime Minister Arthur also suggested that some of the Eastern Caribbean's heavily indebted economies, e.g., St. Kitts and Nevis, could benefit from a debt relief program similar to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program that has benefited so many others. Ambassador Kramer pointed to the assistance we are already providing through USAID's work with Antigua and Dominica on their national strategic plans. While these plans do not provide economic assistance or debt relief per se, they do give these countries an opportunity to assess their current economic situations and work on solutions with all relevant stakeholders. Ambassador Kramer also urged Prime Minister Arthur to remain engaged with the region's leaders and encourage them along the path of economic reform.

17. (SBU) Shoring up the region's economic prospects will also require more work on disaster preparedness and risk management, another priority for Prime Minister Arthur. He hopes to organize a meeting of the region's heads of government and U.S. state governors from the South and Eastern seaboard to review the region's state of readiness and risk management strategies. Ambassador Kramer welcomed these plans, noting that the meeting could draw on a significant body of information that could be assembled from studies of recent natural disasters, to include lessons learned from the impact of and response to Hurricane Ivan in 2004. She urged the Prime Minister to include the private sector, especially the regional insurers, and suggested he work with Barbadian Steve Stoute of the Insurance Association of the Caribbean, who could assist the Prime Minister's efforts to engage some of the U.S. states usually affected by hurricanes.

RSS C-26s

18. (SBU) PM Arthur raised the proposal Ambassador Kramer put to him about the possibility of the Regional Security System (RSS) Air Wing deploying one of its two C-26s to Colombia for maritime surveillance operations (reftel). He said this was still in discussion among the RSS Council of Ministers and he hoped to send a formal reply to the embassy soon.

19. (SBU) Arthur smilingly observed that the RSS might put a

proposition to buy the C-26s from the United States. He further observed that, if the RSS acquired the planes, they would seek a maintenance contract with the United States as they could not fully service the planes on their own. Ambassador Kramer suggested that the Prime Minister consider training the current C-26 crew so that they could perform some of the basic maintenance on the planes and thus conserve the government's resources spent on repairs. Prime Minister Arthur agreed to consider this idea.

Comment

19. (C) Prime Minister Arthur, perhaps more than any other Eastern Caribbean leader, has a good grasp of the challenges facing the region and the need for a strong partnership with the United States. Our shared values and history, as well as our geographic proximity, should provide a firm foundation for that partnership. Too often, however, the health of our partnership seems to depend more on offers of U.S. assistance than on our shared interests. If our Caribbean counterparts deem American aid insufficient, the region is willing to look elsewhere for more generous "partners." Prime Minister Arthur seems to recognize the long-term corrosive effects that this outlook could have on the region. His efforts to improve the region's economic prospects through integration and improved competitiveness could eventually pull the region from its current debilitating dependency on handouts from the likes of Venezuela, Cuba, and China. We should therefore continue to support the CSME process and any other efforts that could give the region the independence, confidence, and stronger voice that the United States needs from its partners.

KRAMER